Did Eminem Bite French Composer's Beat? Hear For Yourself

Jacques Loussier says rapper's 'Kill You' mimics his 'Pulsion.'
By Jennifer Vineyard
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Eminem's "Kill You" has long drawn fire for its controversial lyrics — a brutal expression of violence against women — but now the song is under scrutiny for its beats.

Jacques Loussier, a 67-year-old classical/jazz pianist based in Paris, filed a copyright infringement lawsuit in Manhattan federal court on Thursday, accusing the Grammy-winning rapper of lifting parts of his song "Pulsion" for "Kill You." Not only is the composer seeking $10 million in damages, but he's also asking for a halt to all sales of *The Marshall Mathers LP* and the destruction of all copies still for sale.

"Pulsion," the title track of an album released about 20 years ago, is a crisp, spare piece of pulsing rhythms that climb and decline, springing back and forth in a simple pattern. "Kill You" uses a similar rhythm in tone and structure underneath Eminem's raps about raping and killing his mother — words that were dissected by a Senate committee in September 2000 (see [article id="1428579"]"Eminem Targeted At Senate Hearing"[/article]).

Loussier is charging that the musical material is not just similar, but that it's the same, and that Eminem (born Marshall Bruce Mathers III) "willfully infringed upon [Loussier's] rights by intentionally copying portions of 'Pulsion' and including those portions in a song entitled 'Kill You,' " according to the complaint. (For samples of both songs, see the Audio & Video links on the right side of this page.)

Loussier himself, though, built a career on appropriating material — jazzing up classical works by Bach, Vivaldi, Debussy, Ravel and Satie. With his Play Bach Trio and Jacques Loussier Trio, he would improvise upon those classical compositions, creating electronic and acoustic arrangements that incorporated not just jazz but also rock elements.

"Pulsion" is one of his more rare, completely original numbers, dating back to the early '80s, when he produced suites for piano, synthesizers, percussion and bass.

"I play the 'Pulsion' theme every time I do a concert," Loussier said, "in between two Bach pieces, and I do about 100 concerts a year. My son, who's obviously familiar with my work, brought it to my attention about three months ago because he's an Eminem fan. So I listened to his CD, and this is my music. Usually, if you [sample], you do a short line, a few notes, you don't make a complete copy. But this is four bars, all the way through the song. This is the same harmony, the same tempo. It's very sharp.

"I didn't know I had made such a success out of Eminem," he said with a laugh. "Just kidding."

Loussier composes most of his pieces at his studio in Miraval, France, which has hosted such artists as Elton John, Sting, Yes and Pink Floyd (who used the studio to record parts of *The Wall*). He continues to tour in Europe and records for Telarc, which considers him their best-selling international artist.

A spokesperson for Eminem at Interscope Records, which is also named in the suit, had no comment.